



## Irish Communication Review

Volume 8 | Issue 1

Article 10

January 2000

### Book Reviews: Volume 8

Follow this and additional works at: <https://arrow.tudublin.ie/icr>



Part of the [Communication Technology and New Media Commons](#)

#### Recommended Citation

(2000) "Book Reviews: Volume 8," *Irish Communication Review*. Vol. 8: Iss. 1, Article 10.

doi:10.21427/D75137

Available at: <https://arrow.tudublin.ie/icr/vol8/iss1/10>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals Published Through Arrow at ARROW@TU Dublin. It has been accepted for inclusion in Irish Communication Review by an authorized administrator of ARROW@TU Dublin. For more information, please contact [yvonne.desmond@tudublin.ie](mailto:yvonne.desmond@tudublin.ie), [arrow.admin@tudublin.ie](mailto:arrow.admin@tudublin.ie), [brian.widdis@tudublin.ie](mailto:brian.widdis@tudublin.ie).



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 3.0 License](#)



Michael Foley is a  
Lecturer in Journalism  
at the Dublin Institute  
of Technology.

## Chris Frost *Media Ethics and Self Regulation*

London: Longman, 2000. 271 pp. £stg17.99

ISBN: 0582306051

**Michael Foley**

In the US there has been a long tradition of writing books on journalistic ethics; and not only books, there are journals on media ethics and even a magazine, *Brill's Content*. The *Columbia Journalism Review*, the *American Journalism Review* and others all cover ethical issues. The freedom given to the press under the First Amendment has meant that ethical issues assume a greater importance on the basis that journalists assume they can write something. The issue is now one of whether they should. As with so much else we are following the US and an increasing number of works on ethics are being published. While working journalists still tend to find the subject of ethics embarrassing, media sections of newspapers are taking ethical issues increasingly seriously.

Why is this? Why this fascination with the good and bad of journalism, the behaviour of its journalists and the problems of regulating the press. There are a number of reasons. Ethics provides a ready and scholarly area of study for what is increasingly being called, 'journalism studies'. This new subject has arisen out of journalism training and media studies and ethics seems to offer instant academic respectability to a subject which too often wants to apologise for its existence in the academy. How can a traditionalist professor doubt the validity of a subject that has Aristotle, Kant, Russell, the Existentialists, Bentham, Moore, Hare and Ayer at its centre? At least the study of journalism will be respectable, even if the practice is not.

This is not a cynical viewpoint. Media studies tends to look at the end product, the product of media activity. Journalism studies is looking at the 'how to' and is still defining what exactly journalism is. Increasingly it is finding that media studies and communications theory are not a useful base for what is emerging as a new subject that merges theory and practice, the professional and academic, and views journalism as a discipline independent of the media. The student of journalism today is the practitioner of tomorrow. Ethics has a central place in this new subject that is about educating reflective journalists rather than just training journalists. With ethics at its heart journalism educators are saying that they want more than a critique of journalism, they actually want to influence the practice and possibly produce better journalism with all the implications that might have for civic culture and civic participation.

The other reason, is, of course, the pressure within the establishment to control the media as it becomes increasingly central to a media obsessed political establishment. This is taking place as readers and audiences are becoming more and more cynical and the media, especially print, is finding it increasingly difficult to engage readers. Its answer is too often to seek out sensationalism. In Britain, Ireland and other parts of Europe the question has been less how should a free press behave ethically, but what sort of regulation will ensure the press behaves ethically.

Ethics and press regulation is not a new idea. It was Lord Northcliffe who instructed his journalists, 100 years ago, to give him a murder a day. As long as the press were concerned with so called human interest there have been those seeking to regulate or modify the behaviour of the press. In 1936 the annual conference of the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) adopted a code of conduct that is more or less still the union's code, though amended regularly to take account of changing fashion and concerns.

In this country concern about the behaviour of the press is more recent. The media in Ireland has traditionally been rather respectful and conscious of being involved in the serious business of nation building and defining democracy within a new state. With the decline in the power and influence of the Church, politicians and other authority figures, the media, the press in particular, has come under increased scrutiny from some of

those same people. There is also little doubt that the Irish press has got bolder and possibly braver, while the influence of the British press, with Irish editions and increased sales, has become increasingly strong. In June 1996, newspaper industry representatives agreed that some sort of voluntary regulatory system should be established and, in return, the Government would agree to reform the laws of libel as recommended by the Law Reform Commission in 1991. Although this has not happened yet, it signalled a willingness on the part of the press to consider regulation if only in return for something else. In July 1998 Senator Kathleen O'Meara, of the Labour Party, launched her proposal for a voluntary, non-statutory, press council.

The report of the Commission on the Newspaper Industry (June 1996) recommended that a newspaper Ombudsman, funded by the newspaper industry, be appointed to investigate complaints of breaches of press standards (not including defamation) and that extensive changes in the law of libel be introduced as a matter of urgency.

That unfortunately has been the level of discussion in this country. Other than a handful of NUJ activists, journalists have left discussion of ethics and regulation to newspaper publishers. The debate has therefore centred around libel reform, because that costs money. Ethics has been seen as a currency, something that might be used to pay for reform of the libel and other laws relating to the media.

*Media Ethics and Press Regulation* by Chris Frost is aimed at students of journalism. It comes with chapter summaries and questions. It offers a ready made course and course text for the many new journalism courses that are coming on stream, especially in Britain. It is valuable because it is based on British conditions and its legal environment and on a media that we know well and is familiar in this country, rather than the many US texts, that are based on the strong First Amendment tradition.

Mr Frost is a different sort of academic author and is probably an indicator of how things will develop within academic journalism. He is a former newspaper journalist, but also a former president of the NUJ. He now lectures at the University of Central Lancashire but is still engaged with journalists and is currently the chair of the NUJ's Ethics Council, the watchdog of the code of conduct that was voted on in 1936.

One might review Mr Frost's work simply in terms of how it works as a text and if it would be useful in the lecture hall. In that it is a valuable addition and especially useful in linking current concerns about right and wrong, good and bad, ethical and unethical to the classical and modern major ethical thinkers. This he does in an introduction that asks 'what are ethics'. Importantly, he also integrates the thinking of Aristotle and Kant into the later discussions of media ethics and behaviour. This is necessary because to see media ethics as simply a code or a series of rules allows it to be ignored when found inconvenient. To be educated in ethics means discussions and arguments about professional practice will always be about right and wrong, good and bad.

This work, however, is more than a college text book, because at its heart is a critique of the present voluntary regulatory system in Britain, currently called the Press Complaints Commission (PCC) but which has traded under many names since the system was first introduced in the 1950s.

Frost looks at the role of law and the enforcement of ethical standards. The usual way is either through law, a statutory regulatory body or a mixture of both. Most western-style democracies have developed a cultural ethic for journalists that cover in some way most or all of the issues of truth, privacy, harassment and fairness. In some cases the society concerned will enforce that ethic by legislation and it is one of the more interesting and revealing areas of study for those seeking difference in national cultures and identities,' (p 106).

It is perfectly possible for the press to be answerable under the law but not to the state. The British press, he points out, is already tightly controlled and the effect of this is to distort the view as to what is ethical and what is not. 'Journalists have become so

busy trying to slip around the wording of this law or that that they rarely step back and look at the ethical dimension of what they are doing' (p 107)

He addresses the question so many who control the press ignore: why is it that whilst the press is allegedly free, constrained only by a voluntary self regulating body, broadcasting is hedged in by statutory regulatory bodies and laws about what can and cannot broadcast?

Frost's arguments are interesting for those concerned with how the media will develop in Ireland. The Minister responsible for broadcasting, Ms Sile deValera, intends to put in place a new regulatory body that will replace the IRTC. It will have wide powers in relations to all broadcasting outside RTE, including issues of taste. The RTE Authority will remain in place acting as a regulator for public service broadcasting, while the Broadcasting Complaints Authority will have its powers strengthened.

In the meantime the newspaper industry, including the journalists through the NUJ, have offered to adhere to the rulings of a voluntary council or ombudsman if libel is reformed.

Frost accepts that an argument for impartiality on television but not the press can be sustained; he is less convinced by strict regulation on fairness and privacy for television, but not the press. He also suggests that the view in Britain that holds broadcasting to be more trustworthy than the press might in part be due to this.

Frost is concerned that strict laws have the effect of masking the moral principle. One way around this, he suggests, is to use law at one remove, by giving regulatory bodies statutory powers. This is where a body is established under statute, its membership selected according to criteria laid down by law and its methods of hearing complaints and punishing offenders also laid down by statute. The Broadcasting Standards Commission in the UK and our own Broadcasting Complaints Commission are two such bodies.

This is a very controversial viewpoint and to understand what the newspaper industry would think of it just consider what the eminent British QC, Mr Geoffrey Robertson, had to say in his book *Freedom. The Individual and the Law*: 'The British newspaper industry not only deploys its editorial space to campaigning against a privacy law, it has established a sophisticated public relations exercise called the Press Complaints Commission, with an annual budget of £1 million to convince Parliament that its ethics are susceptible to what it optimistically describes as "self-regulation". But the PCC is a confidence trick which has failed to inspire confidence, and forty years of experience of "press self-regulation" demonstrates only that the very concept is an oxymoron' (Robertson, 1993: 111).

Journalists, rather than proprietors, might consider Frost's argument, for as he says, a statutory body has to have an appeals mechanism. An appeal system gives journalists the chance to fight their corner. Frost is clearly of the opinion that voluntary systems, as he has experienced them in the UK and within the UK's press culture, act in their own and the industry's self interest. On the one hand cases are sometimes not properly tested because it would not be in the interest of the self-regulator to do so. On the other it might bring in a judgement in a case that was not in fact unethical in order to maintain its position and knowing that the only punishment would be the publication of its adjudication. In this instance the system might be protected but the journalist would not and could not appeal the decision. The self-regulatory systems might well sacrifice the individual journalist to what it considers a greater good, its own preservation, whereas a statutory system would given the journalist an appeals mechanism, through the courts.

Frost holds that it is difficult for the newspaper industry to credibly maintain its opposition to a statutory body when the same industry will say that a voluntary body doing more or less the same is perfectly acceptable. However, the question that has to be

answered, he says, is 'what is wrong with statutory regulation for the press if it is all right for broadcasters?'

This is an interesting and useful book, and made more interesting by incorporating an argument that many in the newspaper industry would prefer not made. What is not dealt with in detail is the counter argument being made by the increasing number of commercial broadcasters, outside the public service sector. Why should they be subject to statutory regulation? As the number of radio and television channels increases and trans-national television becomes more common, the regulation of television and broadcasting is being questioned and becomes increasingly difficult to sustain.

Frost is very much a product of the British newspaper environment, where voluntary regulation has been in existence since the 1950s. He does not consider whether regulation itself works, just whether the British self-regulatory system has worked. In Ireland so many incidences of alleged press bad behaviour are more often than not questions of taste, which no regulatory system could police without a serious threat to press freedom. Maybe, in the interests of democracy, we will have to accept that a free press is a flawed one and that regulation is not possible. If that is the case then the question of ethical education for journalists becomes even more urgent.

The book does have some flaws itself; why so little attention to Northern Ireland? The political conflict in Northern Ireland is the single longest running story in the British media this century. For thirty years people living in the UK were being shot and bombed. British soldiers patrolled the streets and were engaged with a number of guerrilla armies, yet it was covered so badly in the British press. Northern Ireland and its portrayal in the British media has far more case studies of fundamental ethical failings than the coverage of Princess Diana. She gets twelve entries in the index and Northern Ireland one.

Not all the terms used are defined. Sensationalism is a bad thing, to the extent that there is a rather odd diagram portrayal of how and when sensational becomes a risk. It strikes one as rather po-faced and a bit like communication theory's attempts to look scientific. In 1953 the legendary editor of the Daily Mirror in Britain, Hugh Cudlipp defended himself against the accusation of sensationalism, saying: 'The Mirror is a sensationalist paper. We make no apology for that. We believe in the sensational presentation of news and views, especially important news and views, as a necessary and valuable public service in these days of mass readership and democratic responsibility. Sensationalism does not mean distorting the truth, it means the vivid and dramatic presentation of events so as to give them a forceful impact on the minds of the reader.'

In other words there is good and bad sensationalism, just like there is good and bad journalism and ethical and unethical journalism.

## References

Robertson, G. (1993) *Freedom, the Individual and the Law*, 7th ed. London: Penguin Books.

David Quin is a  
Lecturer in Journalism,  
Dublin Institute of  
Technology.

## Damien Kiberd (ed.) *Media in Ireland: The Search for Ethical Journalism.*

Dublin: Open Air, 1999. 96pp. stg£6.95 (pbk.)  
ISBN: 1851823158

David Quin

It's a long, long way from Socrates to *The Star*. And it's a long way from Socrates to Gerry O'Regan, former editor of the Irish edition of *The Star*, now editor of the *Evening Herald*. The title of the first paper in *The Search for Ethical Journalism* is: 'What would Socrates say? Towards a foundation in media ethics.' 'But what would Gerry O'Regan say?'

There is a huge gap between books about media ethics and most Irish journalists. If asked to unfold the ethics of their daily practice, they would probably surprise us, and themselves as well. But ethical self-examination is not exactly an obsessive occupation of Irish journalism culture.

This culture revealed itself in a remarkable way at a session of the Media Forum for MA students of the Faculty of Arts of the Dublin Institute of Technology, held at Aungier Street in January, 2000.

The forum session, in theory, was to feature a panel of five leading journalists discussing ethical issues. However, in practice, it turned into an infotaining ping-pong of argument and banter between, on the far left (of the table), Damien Kiberd, editor of the *Sunday Business Post* as well as of the book under review, and, on the extreme right, Mr O'Regan himself. Mr Kiberd, who is, of course, on the side of the angels and Socrates, made his ethical points. And Mr O'Regan raised some valid questions, suggesting, in essence, that newspapers are as ethical as they can *afford* to be. (For example, is it possible that there might be a link between the noble broadsheets' coverage of property and the fact that they rake in a huge amount of revenue in property advertising?)

What was remarkable was the extent to which O'Regan pulled back and at times silenced other members of the panel who had begun edging towards the high moral ground. The former *Star* editor repeatedly put them on the defence – not only by means of mockery and good-humoured bully-banter, but also, it seems, because they were reluctant to take up a strong position on the high moral ground in case they were seen as self-righteous, priggish, smug and hypocritical.

*Me virtuous? Certainly not ...*

A Fleet Street editor, told that an ethics expert was talking to his journalists, reportedly exclaimed: 'Efficks! What's That?' This was the title chosen for the overall forum. It turned out to be ironically apposite.

Given that working as a journalist entails so sharp a conflict between competing interests in a job in which ethical considerations are so easily overridden, it is worrying that bottom-line journalists can so easily force their ethically minded colleagues into defensive mode. Irish journalism needs to do some ethical thinking, and *The Search for Ethical Journalism*, the outcome of the Seventh Cleraun Media Conference, in February 1998, does a good job at opening up the issues.

It is introduced by American financial consultant William Hunt, who is now based in Ireland. While smartly summarising and relating the essays of the various contributors, he also offers his own observations. His strongest proposal is that the media would better serve the public 'if the media itself were to feature more explicitly in its own coverage of the institutions that govern our lives'. (p13)

The first essay is by Brendan Purcell of UCD's Philosophy Department. Using personal conversation as his model, he suggests that journalists should speak to their

readers in good faith, with the same standards of morality as apply when we converse honestly with another person. The notion of journalism as conversation in good faith is suggestive and flexible. The essay is a worthy attempt to establish basic philosophical principles for the practice of journalists. But it is academically distant from the immediate problems of working in daily journalism. Purcell describes the journalist as a 'person-in-dialogue'. Tell that to the hacks!

If good journalism is comparable to honest conversation, then the reporting about refugees and asylum-seekers in some newspapers from 1977 onwards may be likened to scaremongering gossip and the relaying of destructive rumour. *Irish Times* journalist Andy Pollak argues that 'treatment of the refugee issue', particularly by O'Reilly's newspapers, 'did a considerable amount to change the benign, if ignorant, attitude of most Irish people to refugees into something much more volatile and potentially dangerous in the short space of less than twelve months'. The extent of Irish colour-blindness had not been severely tested previously – by a neat and tiny influx of College of Surgeons students – but Mr Pollak convincingly marshals the evidence of an 'embarrassing litany of sloppy, sensationalist and sometimes mischief-making reporting and sub-editing' (he does not omit to mention a 'momentary lapse' by his own paper), and specifically of 'Independent Newspapers pandering to the most fearful and xenophobic strands in our island people's character'. He suggests that people should write letters of complaint to Dr A.J.F. O'Reilly, that great supporter of Nelson Mandela. If anyone thinks that his newspapers have calmed down since 1977 and become more responsible, they can not have been reading *The Sunday World* recently.

Following up and complicating Pollak's analysis, Klaus Schonbach of the University of Amsterdam examines the role of journalists in the outbreak of racist violence in Germany in the early 1990s. He shows how good intentions and the principle of truth-telling were not good enough. In effect, he argues for – beyond an ethics of conscience – an ethics of responsibility; for sensitivity to and care about the consequences of one's reporting. In an Irish context, the dilemma could be, for instance: how do you report a crime by a particular Traveller without intensifying prejudice against Travellers in general? Schonbach argues: 'Even if a report is completely true and important according to news criteria, journalists cannot leave it at that.' It's a funny business, journalism. Bad journalism can do much more damage than a planning development, but to propose that journalists working on sensitive stories be required to prepare community impact statements would be preposterous. Of course. Another Cleraun conference could well be devoted to the problem Schonbach raises.

Claude Bertrand of the French Press Institute believes that 'the fate of mankind' depends on 'improving' the media. While Mr O'Regan might demur at that, his hackles will not rise so much at M. Bertrand's avoidance of the term 'media ethics', which is, as he says, loaded with 'moralistic connotations, which irritate some people'. Instead he speaks of 'quality control'. He also points out that 'quality control implies action, not talk'. Fair point. And he does mean action: media accountability systems set up by 'media owners/controllers/managers'. I doubt if Dr A.J.F. O'Reilly is listening. There is a problem here. Control of quality is essential in most businesses which aim to be successful. The public will not buy stale bread but they will buy bad papers, or what some of us like to categorise as bad papers. From where, then, will the pressure for quality control and media accountability systems arise?

*Irish Times* editor Conor Brady might reply that he does not need any such pressure: 'The Readers' Representative at *The Irish Times* satisfactorily resolved more than ninety per cent of the complaints or observations which were lodged last year', he points out. He lacks the imperviousness to criticism common to some of his colleagues: 'Irish editors and journalists, in too many instances, are not responsive to complaints. We ... are slow to import into our own thinking the standards of openness and accountability which we so readily urge upon others.' It is not clear, however, how far he includes himself and his own paper in this criticism. In other parts of his paper, he lashes out at the low standards of some other Irish newspapers. (He does not name them, but we can

make a wild guess.) He is, it seems, open to the notion of a newspaper ombudsman which he believes would be the *quid pro quo* 'if we have action from government on libel'. But, despite his fine summary of the absurdity of our libel laws, there is no sign of government urgency on that little matter.

As regards an ombudsman, Robert Healy, former executive editor of the *Boston Globe*, in an interesting account of American experience of the Swedish 'go-between', confirms M. Bertrand's point that the support of owners is needed to make quality control and accountability systems work.

The answer to our problems would appear to be Britain's self-regulatory system, judging from the examination by Robert Pinker, Privacy Commissioner of the British Press Complaints Commission, of the workings of the Code of Practice introduced after Diana's death. It works, and it is upheld by industry, he says. For example, 'thanks to the cooperation of the industry and the work of the Commission, there has been a marked improvement in press conduct at the scene of major tragedies'. The system as he outlines it does seem to be improving the standards of the less scrupulous of the British press in many ways, but they do, after all, have a long way to climb to even the lower moral ground. The commission has often been dismissed as lacking teeth. But the teeth of an Irish equivalent would probably not need to be devastatingly sharp, since it would not have to deal with a press as carnivorous as Britain's, and in Ireland's smaller community it might more easily embarrass the worst culprits on to at least the lower reaches of the high moral ground.

Sean Duignan, it appears, was not sure what kind of moral ground he was on when Government Press Secretary (GPS) for Albert Reynolds. Discussing leaking by spin doctors, he says it may be 'a somewhat dishonourable business', 'usually done for the most venal and self-serving reason', but is at the same time, 'in the exercise of practical politics ... as natural, and unavoidable, as breathing'. As GPS, he 'participated energetically and enthusiastically in the whole business'. But 'poor Diggy', as he calls himself at one point, 'wasn't good at it'. As a former journalist, he knows that the media want to have it both ways: newspapers rise in righteous indignation against political leaks, but did you ever hear of a journalist who refused the leak of a glorious exclusive?

Mr Hunt, however, sharply details the pernicious effects of leaking, including the diversion of journalists *towards* what politicians want them to know and away from what they want them not to know. In his call for media coverage of the media, he also points towards one of the oddities of the media, summarised by the US Hutchins Commission on the Freedom of the Press in 1944 (quoted by Healy):

'One of the most effective ways of improving the press is blocked by the press itself. By a kind of unwritten law, the press ignores the errors and misrepresentations, the lies and scandals, of which its members are guilty.'

An example of this, as Mr Hunt points out, was the failure of *The Irish Times* to cover as a 'legitimate news story' *The Star's* nonsense about 'Refugee rapists on the rampage'. It is a telling example of how media reluctance to cover the media amounts at times to a serious dereliction of duty.

Such a lacuna in coverage comes on top of the fact that the fourth estate probes and castigates almost every area of Irish life that is open to question, yet itself is, in general, hypersensitive to and dismissive of any criticism of its own behaviour, and maintains practices which if followed by any other organisation would be thunderously denounced from the editorial pulpit. This is a fine book, in the main, which debates in useful detail many of the ethical issues in Irish journalism which need not merely to be discussed, but acted upon. But from where will the pressure for higher standards come? From the public, which grouches about the media but will continue to devour its products voraciously? From the politicians, who will continue to play the cat-and-mouse game with the media, in which sometimes they are the cat and sometimes the mouse? From



journalists who, between the public interest, commercial interests and their own interests, have a difficult balancing act to perform? Or from owners such as Dr A.J.F. O'Reilly?

Mr Hunt criticises the Irish media for failing to make a 'concerted attempt to inform the public' about the effects of the libel laws 'and enlisting their support to oblige our politicians to live, if not in the current decade, at least in this century' – which is now the next century. The tribunal revelations continue to stir public indignation about the secret scandals engaged in by some of our libel-law-protected politicians. What better time for the media to campaign for the reform of the libel laws – accompanied by a plan to establish either a press ombudsperson or a press council?

---

## Peter Mason and Derrick Smith *Magazine Law: A Practical Guide*

London: Routledge, 1998, 216pp.  
ISBN 0-415-15142-2

Eavan Murphy is a  
Lecturer in Media Law,  
Dublin Institute of  
Technology.

### Eavan Murphy

One of the chapters in this book consists of tips for those training journalists, who ideally should be 'qualified lawyers who specialise in media matters and are experienced journalists'. The authors – a barrister who specialises in copyright and publishing law, and a freelance journalist who is a media law specialist – may have been describing themselves, but their experience shows in this clear, useful guide to magazine law.

The book is split into a large number of short chapters, with punchy titles and subheadings like 'Of course it's true but can we prove it' and 'In the public interest or just interesting to the public?'. The journalism experience of the authors is obvious, because unlike many legal texts, this book is easy to read and understand. It is designed for a non-legal readership, and contains a handy glossary of legal terms such as coroner, *in camera*, and injunction (although I've never come across the term 'law-laws', apparently an umbrella term for all laws and also slang for the police).

Six chapters – almost half the text – are given over to consideration of defamation. Each chapter ends with a useful checklist of the key issues to be checked before publication of an article. The authors recommend replacing the traditional test of 'if in doubt, leave it out' with 'if in doubt, find out'. As an English text book, the focus is on the recent Defamation Act 1996, which Irish journalists working under the Defamation Act 1961 can only look at enviously. There is good consideration of possible libel through publication of reader's letters, mis-captioning photographs and critical restaurant reviews and other less obvious issues in defamation.

*Magazine Law* does not deal with defamation in online publishing, which is an area of increasing litigation as many periodicals go online, (as well as creating increased difficulties with copyright). The recent unsuccessful libel case taken by Texan beef producers against Oprah Winfrey for allegedly libelling beef in a television programme dealing with mad cow disease, is not included, presumably because it came too late for publication. It would have made a graphic and entertaining example, which are the types of cases Mason and Smith focus on. For example, a number of references are made to a 1959 action by Liberace against the *Daily Mail* when he successfully sued them for defamation for suggesting that he was a homosexual, but the case seems to be included mainly for its supposed entertainment value of repeating the description of Liberace as, among other things, a 'quivering, giggling, fruit-flavoured, mincing, ice

covered heap of mother love'. By contrast, the chapter on privacy makes no mention of such ethical issues as reporting of sexual orientation. Indeed the privacy chapter is somewhat misleading when it deals with 'other remedies' available instead of complaints to the Press Complaints Commission. It is not clear that these are remedies which *may* be available, rather than alternatives. This is important because most complaints of invasion of privacy by the press occur where there is no other legal protection, highlighting the lack of a law on privacy. This lack is not apparent from this book.

The chapter on copyright provides some interesting points of comparison with the new Irish Copyright and Related Rights Bill 1999. A number of the new features of the Irish bill are already part of English law, e.g. moral rights such as the paternity and integrity rights. It is interesting to see English practitioners' views of their operation; 'the practical day to day implications of the introduction of moral rights into magazine journalism were horrendous'. An issue as important as copyright could really have done with greater detail, whereas something like contempt of court which is far less important for most magazines is given equal weighting.

The issue of journalists' confidentiality is also dealt with too briefly. The groundbreaking Goodwin case, where the European Court of Human Rights protected the confidentiality of journalists' sources is barely explained, it is simply one of a number of examples. This use of case law as illustration is somewhat unsatisfactory. In keeping with the tone of the book, the examples are brief and more anecdotal than instructive. There are no full references or years of the cases given for the reader who wishes to look at one in more detail, and the reader could easily get the impression that the cases are simply the result of the law, rather than actually creating the law in many cases.

Overall however, this is exactly what the title promises – a 'practical guide' to magazine law. It would be very useful desk top reference book, if used with the proviso that English and Irish law are similar but not identical.